

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: ROSE COYNE
INTERVIEWER: DAN COYNE
FEMALE VOICE:
MALE VOICE:
DATE: MAY 22, 1988**

**D = DAN
R = ROSE**

SG-NA-T011

INTERVIEW BEGINS WITH INTERVIEWER: All right, this is Daniel Coyne interviewing Rose Coyne, my grandmother for the Shifting Gears Project, May 20, 1988.

D: All right. First I need to know (--) The first thing I need to know is the names of your grandparents. And you can tell me like where they're from, or you know, their ethnic background where they're from.

R: You've got them on there?

D: Yup, it's going.

R: Oh. Now listen, I didn't plan on this. [D: Laughs] Well, one of my grandmothers is, her name was Octavie. Octavie, [spells] O-C-T-A-V-I-E [D: would that be?] Belanger. [D: Belanger] And the grandfather's name was Joseph Belanger. Now he, Joseph Belanger died. They lived in Canada and the grandfather was a logger. And he got pneumonia and he died. [D: Umhm] And then of course my grandmother Octavie married her second husband whose name was Nelson Gilbert.

D: Umhm. Was he a french canadian as well?

R: He was also a french canadian.

D: Umhm. Was he a logger, or don't you, do you remember?

R: Oh he was a, he was a foreman in a woolen mill. [D: Umhm] And they went from (--) They were married, the second marriage, from Michigan. Michigan and moved to New Hampshire, then to Central Falls and then to Pawtucket, Rhode Island. And that's where my family settled. Later on those people came back to North Adams. And of course naturally my mother was with them.

D: These are, these are your mother's parents?

R: Yeah, were my mother's parents. They came back to North Adams and we lived up in Clarksburg. And that's where I was born, in Clarksburg.

D: Right. What about your father's parents?

R: Well they both came from Ireland. [D: Umhm, did um?] But I don't have the names of them right now. But I know they came from Ireland, but they settled in Vermont. And they drifted from Vermont down through the Dorsets and Bennington and Williamstown and North Adams.

D: Right. So your grandparents on your father's side were born originally in Ireland? [R: Yeah] And then they moved, came over? [R: Yeah] What did they do for, what did he do for work?

R: Well of course naturally the grandmother was a housewife, you know. [D: Right] And uh, but the grandfather, he was a, where you make monuments. You know, granite worker.

D: A granite worker? Umhm. All right. And so where, then where did your, where did your father grow up?

R: My father was born in Rutland, Vermont. [D: Umhm] And uh, huh. As the family grew they lived in all of these places. They lived in Rutland, Proctor, The Dorsets, North Bennington, Williamstown, and then North Adams. Well by the time they hit North Adams I think my father might have been twenty years old. Fifteen or twenty years old.

D: Right. So he's, they had been all over the place? [R: Yeah] And your mom grew up uh?

R: Oh, she grew up mostly in North Adams.

D: Or up in [R: In Clarksburg] Clarksburg. Okay. And what did your parents do for a living. Your father was um?

R: He was a woolen weaver.

D: Where?

R: In [Briggsville?], Briggsville, Mass.

D: Umhm. And your mom was a house wife?

R: Yeah, but she worked you know, different places. She worked in the Hoosit Cotton Mill. She was a spinner. That's what the old people did. They all worked in those kind of mills. They were all over town. All over. They would sometimes, like my aunt, we lived down Central Avenue. She would got to work in the morning in the Eagle Mill down here, which is torn down. I don't know, you don't remember it. And when she'd come home at night, we'd ask her how her job was. And she'd say, "which one?" She'd be transferred to the Windsor Print Works. [Both chuckle] That's how they would get jobs. They didn't like that one they'd just go to another place.

D: [Laughs] So I take it that it wasn't much problem for even women to get jobs in the different textile mills around?

R: Oh no. They could(--). At that time you know, there was a call for them, because they inspected the cloth and did you know, work like that.

D: Umhm. So where were your parents living when you were born?

R: North Adams.

D: Up in um?

R: Prospect Street. North Adams, Mass. Prospect Street.

D: I thought you were born up at the top of Franklin where the Lemire's are?

R: Yeah, but you asked me where they were living.

D: Oh, oh, I see.

R: I was born in Clarksburg, [D: okay (laughs)] but they lived in North Adams. See my mother must have went up to Clarksburg one night when she was sick from me, see. And of course I was born during a terrific storm where the doctors couldn't come. And I had quite a (--) They always tell me about that. And about this lady that died the same night I was born. She was brought into the house with here long hair trailing. And my mother could see her from the next bedroom.

D: Oh wow!

R: And it was quite a lot of excitement, you know? Of course this house I was born in is about um, well there is new houses built up there now, but, because I think it's about the fourth house from the, from the [Moss's pan?]. [D: Umhm] That's the house. It's a long white house, which is just a house now. In the old days it had barns all around it. [D: umhm] It was a nice farm.

D: So um, just for the record. So that would make you 1/2 Irish and 1/2 French Canadian? [R: Yeah] Just about?

R: Half and half. Quite a mixture. [D: Laughs] I take advantage of that too you know. When I want to be French, I get fussy. And when I want to be cranky, I'm Irish. [Laughs] I think the Irish people are more subdued than the French were. [D: Really?] Yeah.

D: Do you find that the difference between your mother and your father?

R: Yeah. Oh yeah, definitely.

D: So how long did you live on Prospect Street when you were growing up?

R: I was just a baby. Uh, no time at all I guess. Just about a year my mother tells me.

D: And then you moved?

R: And then we moved to uh, Franklin Street, up where the Lemire's live. [D: Right] You know that house? [D: Yup] 139 Franklin Street.

D: Umhm. And is that where?

R: And that's where we lived until I was about uh, until 1928. Then we moved to High Street. And one year my father couldn't stand it up there. No, no woods to travel around, or bring his dog to run in. So he just came back and we, we bought this house here.

D: Okay. So uh (--)

R: Of course the reason why we moved from Franklin Street, this is going to be funny. [D: Laughs] Two houses, you know, double. That's a two, duo house. My uncle owned it and my father lived on the other side. But my father helped him repair this old house, which turned out to be really nice. But then my uncle raised the rent to \$7.00 and my father got mad. So we moved. [D: Laughs] Seven dollars a month.

D: Is that where Millie was born?

R: Yeah. Millie was born up there on Franklin Street.

D: Okay. So Millie (--)

R: My sister Mildred.

D: What, what's her full name? Mildred?

R: Mildred May Rivers. [D: What was, Curry, that's right] Yeah, Mildred May Rivers Curry. [D: And um] Mildred May Curry Rivers. I better get that right.

D: And she's, how (--) She's two years younger than you?

R: She's six years.

D: Six years. Um, what year were you born? Just for the record. You don't (--)

R: Oh, how can a person remember? [D: Laughs] I should write that down. 1905.

D: 1905.

R: January 1st.

D: Oh that's right. You were the New, you were the New Year baby.

R: I was the New Year's kid. That's why, that's why you know, there was a party going on up the rode on [Paradise Farm]. And that's how come that accident happened that night, because it was a New Year's Eve party.

D: Oh yeah, that's right. Um, so you've always lived right in this area then.

R: Oh yeah.

D: Where did you go to school?

R: Freeman's School and Saint Joe's, Saint Joseph's High School.

D: So Freeman School is for how many, how many years. From what grades? Do you remember?

R: Four and then the rest was at Saint Joe's grammar school and high school. [D: Umhm] And then I went one year to Bliss Business College.

D: After Saint Joe's? Um, okay. So you went for four years at, at um, what did you say, Freeman School? [R: Yup] And then you transferred to as a fifth grader [R: Yeah] to Saint Joe's and then you stayed there through the twelfth grade?

R: And I had to go to kindergarten. And also when I went to grammar, elementary school of Saint Joe's, I had to go to the ninth grade.

D: I don't understand.

R: Well now you only have eight grades in the elementary. [D: Oh right] Yeah. So I had to go nine grades.

D: Umhm. But you stayed in the same school though, so it was not much of a (--)

R: Oh yeah. But uh, when Bill was behind me two years they eliminated the ninth grade. So

he kind of caught up to me. [D: Laughs] And I also started school when I was older. Now kids, children now go to school when they're four and five. I didn't get to school till I was five or six. [D: Umhm] [Chuckles] That's why I never catch up to the times.

D: And then you went to business school after, for one year. [R: Yeah]. Where was that?

R: Uh, down on Main Street. The building is torn down now.

D: What's, what's the name?

R: Bliss Business College. [D: Okay] Run by McFay.

D: And uh, did you go to Saint Francis Church all of this time?

R: Yeah, always went to Saint Francis Parish.

D: Your whole family was catholic?

R: Yeah. And my mother used to go to the Notre Dame, but after she married she went to Saint Francis.

D: Um. And Saint, Saint Joe's was a religious school I presume.

R: Yup, yup, oh yeah.

D: Taught by all of the nuns and.

R: Yeah, we always had none. And no lays, no lay teacher at that time. [D: Umhm] Not until the last ten years I guess.

D: Um, now before you worked at Sprague's, did you have any jobs when you were younger. Maybe when you were still in school, or?

R: Well when I went to school, for vacations I used to work in the finishing room in the Hoosit Cotton Mill inspecting cloth. [D: Umhm].

D: So what was, what was your job like there?

R: Well they would put the bolts of cloth [few words unclear] on your counter. And you'd pull the cloth down. If there was any specs on it, or any bad spots and you do mark it. So when it went through for you know, packaging, they would remove those, or discard them, or whatever, you know.

D: Umhm. Was that, that was your first job?

R: Yeah.

D: Did you work anyplace else before you worked at Sprague's?

R: Oh yeah! Yeah. I worked in um, I went to work down to Wall, Wall Brothers on National Street. That was a wholesale company. Wholesale clothing company. And I worked in the office. And then it turned to Wall Keller McKee Company and they added a tie factory there. [D: Umhm] And then that went on for about uh, I think it was thirty-four.

D: Did you still work in the office?

R: I was still working there, yeah.

D: Like a secretary, or?

R: Oh yeah. Writing letters and typing and making bills and statement, and whatever you have to do. [D: Umhm, right] No computers in those days. [D: Laughs] No computers in those days. We have lots of little slips from coming down from the girls making the ties, you know. Like say she made $2\frac{1}{3}$ dozen at \$2.25 a piece and you'd get big stacks of them. And some would be $2\frac{1}{2}$, some would be $2\frac{3}{4}$, or $1\frac{5}{6}$. We use to have to figure all of that in our heads. [D: Right] That's why I can figure fractions now. [D: Laughs] I had a good education down there. Then after that went up to the um, Arnold Print Works on, on uh, well where Sprague's is now. That use to be the Arnold Print Works. And uh, I worked in the billing department there for about a year. And then from there I transferred to the city hall and went over and worked. And that was starting to be during a kind of a depression time. And I worked in an ERA office over the Post Office. Then from that I went back to the employment office in the city hall and worked there for about two or three years. And then that was it I guess. [Voice in background]

D: Um, when during this time did you get married? What year was it?

R: Uh, 1933.

D: So this would be while you are working um, [R: yeah, yeah] at the unemployment office?

R: Yeah, yeah. 1933.

D: Okay, and do you want to talk for a minute about grandpa? Um, he's, he was uh, working on the forest at the time?

R: Well in 1933 he was a reserve policeman. [D: umhm] And he didn't get to be a regular policeman till about a year after. And then of course he went up the ranks you know, from then on until he became chief.

D: Just for the record his name is William (--)

R: William F. Coyne.

D: Umhm. And uh, he's, he's a full-bred Irishman.

R: Yeah [D: chuckles], he's full-bred on both sides. And both his parents come from Ireland. [D: Umhm] County Claire is one of them. And Cork I think is the other. They both came from Ireland from a large family. Fourteen children in his family. [D: Right] And they all immigrated to the, to the states.

D: And uh (--)

R: They immigrated to New York, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Illinois, Connecticut, North Adams and Australia. [D: Laughs] The other ones, I don't know how many that is, but that's as far as we've kept track of them.

D: And what year did you have my dad, Terry Coyne?

R: Good thing I got this. [Looking through papers] Uh, August the 11th, 1967, 7.

D: Great, umhm. Um, okay, let's talk for awhile about your work at Sprague, because that's (--)

R: So then I had uh (--) Oh, let's see. Now I tell you, we lived at home here and uh, when it got to be around 1941, that was the year, 1942, World War broke out. World War II? Isn't that 1942? So we went to work to help out. All of the people in town, all the women you know, left their homes and their places and whatever they did and went to Sprague's to help out. And they worked shifts. Morning, noon and night shifts, you know, different shifts. And my sister and I went to the employment office and we started working just before Thanksgiving, [D: uh huh] 1942. I can remember that because it was awfully hard to get to work, [D: chuckles] because there was snow. And the buses, they weren't like they are now. You know, they couldn't make the hills. And lots of times we'd have to, we'd have to, from Eagle Street down there when the bus would stop, well when you get up about uh, oh, Gallop Street, the bus wouldn't go any further. So we used to have to walk the rest of the way up to the Beaver Street Mill.

D: Uh huh. What (--) So did you want to start working there just out of obligation to the country, or did someone (--) [R: Yeah, yeah, just (--)] The whole spirit seem to (--)

R: Just the spirit. Everybody was, had the war spirit. And women were very patriotic at that time. My mother was making bandages for the soldiers down in the veteran's offices. And we were, everybody was patriotic really.

D: So did your sister Millie go down to start at the same time?

R: Yeah, we both started the same time at Beaver Street. Sprague Plant, Beaver Street. [D: Umhm] And we worked in the um, Vitamin Q room. [D: Okay] And that was a room of, this was for the Western Electric. And we made condensers. And it was a dust proof room. [D: Uh huh] No air condition. [D: Laughs] Soldering in a room with no air coming in. And it was really awful. It was the hottest thing I ever got into. But it only lasted a little while. Then they uh, the sent (--) The room did good so they sent us down to um, Brown Street. So they moved

the room down there. And then that was a big room. And then we had air condition and uh, you know, they had uh, perfected I suppose.

D: Yeah. What um, first of all before we talk more about your (--) Did you have any other family members working there? Did your mother work down at Sprague's, or?

R: My mother went to work. She worked in one room, but I can't remember now. I think she went up to Beaver Street too. [D: Umhm] And uh, my mother-in-law went. She worked the night shift. I think my mother worked the night shift too, but one worked at Brown Street, the other worked at Marshall. [D: Umhm] They just loved to go to work. They felt like it was um, well it was really great to go to work and do something different like that.

D: Umhm. So did um, I mean when you first went down were you excited about doing it? Did you (--)

R: Well we didn't think we knew, we would be able to do it, because I wasn't used to doing that kind of work. My sister was a telephone operator and she didn't know how she was going to make out. But it's, it's monotonous. One thing, you do one right then you can do them all right after they teach you. [D: Yeah] You know, it's just the same thing all the while.

D: What was um, what was it like shifting from working at the textile mills and all of the other places that you worked, to going to Sprague's? Did you have to you know, you had to be trained obviously. a little.

R: Oh you mean like working from a white collar job to a, to Sprague?

D: Yeah, just making the transition.

R: Well nothing is hard for me. Didn't bother me. [Both laugh] I'm easy going so it was easy to learn.

D: Did you have (--) How much training did they give you?

R: Oh, they uh, you would learn that in a day or so, [D: Umhm] but you'd have to, practice makes perfect, you know? You'd have to get the solder around all the little squares and make sure you know, there wasn't no paper insulation showing. And yeah, it was a, it was a very special job.

D: So this is the, the dust free?

R: Yeah, very special job. [D: What was?] It always remained special, even down in Brown Street. [D: Uh huh] And then after Brown Street um, what happened then? Oh I think I got um, the room moved up to Marshall Street.

D: This is the same job though?

R: Yeah, the same job.

D: So they just moved the rooms around?

R: So, well before I left Brown Street the order slackened up. And then I did a little office work at Brown Street. [D: Umhm] And from there, when that room closed, then they sent the same room back up to Marshall Street. They called it by the way, Miscellaneous Dry Test and Shipping, Western Electric. All of this was in the west, for the Western Electric. [D: Umhm] It was done by Sprague's.

D: So what was your typical day like when you first went in? You know, when you were in the dust free condenser room?

R: Well you'd have to hustle and get there on time and punch a clock. That was the worst thing for me. [Both laugh] Because I never had to punch a clock before.

D: I'm sure we'll hear more about this from your sister.

R: Yeah, yeah. She'll tell you about that. How I used to make her late every morning. Cause going to Marshall Street, when you punch the clock in and uh, when you go in the gate a Marshall Street and of course you walk through all of those buildings, and you know Marshall Street, the plant is opposite Holten Street, and you walk all of those, through those buildings and our room was at the very end of that Sprague complex. [D: laughs] I think that's right opposite [Veasy] Street. Well you walk the whole length of that. Upstairs, downstairs, up ramps, down ramps till you finally got there. [Laughs] And really, it would really take you at least five minutes walking like crazy I'm telling you. My sister used to be about two feet ahead of me all the while. [All laugh] That was awful. Sometimes I'd fall you know, and she'd turn around. Oh, she'd say, god sakes watch where you're going! [All laugh] So we'd finally get there, but she was late several times on account of me. And at first if you got late, well they would give you so many minutes to be late. But I usually took advantage of them. [D: Laughs] But after that my sister really uh, she'd go ahead and leave me way lagging behind. Oh, that, we had fun doing that. Somebody would always catch up to me and we'd you know, walk in together.

D: And uh, so you'd get there.

R: Yeah, and they'd say, here she comes! [Laughs] Yeah, and it was a nice room to work with. All of the women were nice, and the men and the boys. It was like a, it was like a family. You know, everybody knew each other after a while. They all worked there for so many years, because the majority of these quarter century people worked the quarter of a century in the miscellaneous dry test, in that vitamin Q room. Most all of them worked right with me for that many years. [D: Right] So you knew people pretty well.

D: You really got to know them.

R: You know, you're with somebody twenty-five years every day (--)

D: Did you see them? Did you remain friendly with them outside of work and did you see them on social?

R: Oh yeah. Yeah. There was parties and you know, birthdays and stuff like that. And then when somebody retired or there was an anniversary you know, we used to have parties. [D: Umhm] And of course the boss was very nice too. If we had a birthday party on somebody, uh, we use, he used to let us use the lunch room. And we'd get a fifteen minute period off, like for coffee break. He' let us use to lunch room for that. [D: Yeah] It was really nice.

D: Did you, you got along internally well with the management and uh, supervisors?

R: Oh fine. I never had any trouble with the management or supervisors.

D: Uh huh. Did you um (--)

R: My supervisor was uh, Bill Mendal. Bill Mendal, he was the, he was the foreman. Supervisor was uh, a Donald Tetreault and Danny Collins. But then of course there was um, you know, the plant foreman that was Pierce. [D: Umhm] I don't know which one of the Pierce. It was John I think. There's a lot of those Pierce boys that were in Sprague's at that time. So.

D: Did you ever um (--) Were there any any, ever any conflicts between either the workers or the management and the workers that you knew about?

R: No, not too much in my room, but some of the other rooms there would be. But there was a union you know. We'd have to go down and vote. Sometimes you know, the union wanted a raise in pay or something, you know, we'd have to vote.

D: When, when was this? Like when, when did you first become involved with the union?

R: You know I don't know when that union started. Millie might know that. But I never was an active union member. Some people really were, but I never did.

D: Why?

R: I just went along with the crowd, cause I was just there for, to help out.

D: Umhm. Did you (--) Were you (--) So you were generally pleased with the way things were working there?

R: Oh, I was always pleased. Everybody wasn't pleased. But you know, there's (--)

D: Well how did um, what were the changes like from when you first went in to when you know, as the time progressed. You, you worked there for quite a number of years.

R: Well I'd say they were all for the better. You know, working conditions were better and the

tables were new and floors were done over and the place was painted up. And you know, work conditions you know, really, they built them up really good.

D: Yeah. How, how were they when you first went in?

R: Well we just went into an old plant you know, and had to start on what they had. That was up at Beaver Street, and that was an old plant. [D: Yeah] Though they had it painted and like that, but you know, you didn't have a good heating system like they did in the last part of the years. [D: Umhm] Now that Sprague down there now, it's in pretty good condition. I think when MoCA takes over you know, that, some of those rooms won't be too much to do with them. [D: Right] The floors are new and the windows and everything like that.

D: How about wages and benefits? Did, um, did you see a substantial change?

R: Yeah, the wages kept going up a little bit all the while and the benefits were um, well the benefits were good. We'd get the, we had hospital, hospital benefits. [D: Umhm] And we had vacations with pay, but when we first started, holy makaral. I think we had to work a year for three days off. [D: Oh yeah] And then, and then you know, you'd work so many more years and you'd finally (--) I don't know whether it was three years before you got a week, and then by the time you got five years you got two weeks. And then that went on a long time until, when I got through I was getting three weeks. But when my sister got through she was getting five weeks. [D: Wow] So that's how conditions progressed.

D: Yeah. What about your wages? What um, do you remember what your starting wage was?

R: I really don't. It wasn't too much. [D: laughs] I don't think it was too much then. I really don't know. Millie might know then.

D: Do you remember any of your wages, or any idea of what?

R: Oh I know at the end you know, they used to go up over a hundred dollars. [D: A week?] Yeah, but then of course they take your social security out and your hospitalization, and uh, your pension and your credit union. [D: Umhm] So by the time you got your pay you wouldn't have as much as you thought you were going to have. [Both laugh] And it was a great room for selling. It was like a store. One day somebody would have Avons they were selling, next lady would have toys. And then the next one would have pots and pans. [D: Laughs] So you really, every week you have a whole mess of stuff to pay. But it was a good congenial place. And lots of times while we worked there would be you know, the company executives would go through and stop and examine your work. And they look. Now the last room I worked in on Marshall Street, I tested in that room, I didn't solder in there. I tested for about uh, fifteen years. And the units would go into these big tin pans and they'd go up a conveyor. And they'd come off onto your table and they'd set them up straight. And then you'd have your negative and your positive testers and you'd test the units. [D: Right] And if they were bad, of course you'd throw them out. Then they go back on the conveyor and the conveyor would go back up and it would be tested, retested by special supervisors, and they'd retest them again. They'd be tested three or four times before they actually got out the door. So they were really very uh, you know, very,

very sure of what they were sending out.

D: What (--) Now were you given formal promotions? Was the move from the soldering room to the testing, was that a promotion, or did they just change you around and (--)

R: You mean from the soldering room to the testing department?

D: Right.

R: Well no. Like uh, maybe like uh, if there wasn't that much soldering to do, or water testing, or stuff like that, well they'd put you into, you know, put you up in the other room where they needed more work. And then eventually you know, if somebody got through there and you liked that, you know, I'd say well I'd rather be doing testing than doing the [heart] work. So then I started to do that. But that took me long to work. Now wait till I tell you. After that I started to stamp instead of testing. [D: Umhm] Now that was really something to learn.

D: That was on Marshall Street?

R: Yeah, that was after I tested. That I didn't learn so quick, because it had to be perfect, that stamp on those units. [D: Umhm] Well I even brought them home at night. And I was rolling the stamp on to those units. You know, you'd have to take the unit and roll the stamp over. You know, you'd roll right around on it. But you do it just right it would be perfect, you know? So after awhile it got pretty good.

D: Umhm. So did the pay, pay increases and improved benefits, that pretty much came with time? [R: Yeah, yeah] The amount of time you worked there?

R: Yeah. I think it was (--) And of course everything was bonus too, you know. If you could do faster work you'd get more money.

D: Um, what is this? Tell me about this twenty-five club that you were mentioning before.

R: Well they had uh, a Quarter Century Club. And everybody that started with the plant after five years they would get uh, what do you call that? [D: A charm?] A charm. They'd get a charm. Now, and then ten years they'd get another charm. And it kept going up until they'd get to the twenty-fifth year. Every year was a different color. See. Red, green, blue. [D: Umhm] But then the last year, the twenty-fifth year, you'd get a gold charm with a little diamond in it.

D: Which one is it? [Must be looking at the charms]

R: In there.

D: Oh yeah. That's beautiful.

R: And uh, and you'd get a watch for after twenty-five years. You'd get an engraved watch and a certificate. [Long pause-must be looking at certificate].

D: Oh yeah! 1942 to 1967. [Sounds of ruffling of papers]

R: I'll tell you about this in a minute. Let's see what Emily wrote.

D: I'm going to pause this to see how much tape we have left on this side.

R: Yeah. Well let's see [unclear] Sprague's here. It tells you about the Century Club right here Dan. And I can't find out (--) Wait a minute now. Well the year of 1967 when I was admitted to the Quarter Century Club and my sister also, there was a hundred a seventeen new members admitted that year. And that was the highest ever. But you know why that is? That's because we were the people that all went to work at the start of World War II. [D: Oh yeah] And that's what made such a big lot of them that year. [D: Uh huh] But every year anybody that belonged to the Quarter Century could go to the banquet, but of course only the twenty-five year member would get a [D: right], would get the watch and the gold things. [D: Umhm] And the gold charm.

D: And Millie was, got it the same time as you did?

R: Yeah, Millie got it the same time. But, of course, we had a very good dinner and our dinner was held at the uh, 1896 House. And we could bring a quest besides. [D: Umhm] But there was so many people. You know, a hundred and seventeen new members with a quest, that they had to have two places. The earlier members that are already, already were in the club, well they had to have their banquet separate at the 1896 House, [D: Umhm, because there was so many] because there was so many. And after that they had to do that.

D: Uh, when you started working, how old was dad? Approximately. I mean was he young, or (--)

R: When he started to work?

D: When you started working at Sprague's?

R: Oh, well 1905, 1905 from 34.

D: He must have been fairly young.

R: In 1905 he was born and I started Sprague's in 1934. 1942. Yeah, 1942. [D: 37] So it was 37, yeah. [D: So dad] See the World War started in 42. Well dad was uh, dad would have been 35.

D: My father, your son. I want to know about Terry. How old uh (--)

R: Well Terry was born 1933. So 33 from 42 is, that's how old he was.

D: So where did he go while you were working?

R: Well my mother and father were both living here. And Bill worked nights and I worked days. [D: Okay] So it made it fine, it made it great.

D: Yeah. So you never saw Bill then?

R: No, we use to leave notes. [D: Laughs] We had great holidays though.

D: I see.

R: Then of course it says, following the dinner you know, there was always very good speeches. And each, each recipient, each member was presented with an engraved watch. And we had a member certificate and a diamond studded quarter century pins. And they were always presented usually always by Robert C. Sprague, you know, the head of the board and also the chief executive officer. And then he was assisted by Ernest L. Ward, the president. Ernest L. Ward, [spells Ward] W A R D, he was the president at that time. [D: Umhm] And then of course many times, like in the finishing department there where I was doing the stamping, all these executives would go through different times of the month. And there was always a lot of foreigners with them, especially Japanese. Young Japanese men [D: Umhm] learning the business. And they would stop and look over the equipment and see how it was made and watched how you did it and stuff like that. Always very polite. Well Danny, what else do you want to know?

D: Okay. Let's see.

R: I think you've got enough. Millie won't have anything to tell you.

D: [Laughs] Well it's all right if she repeats some of the stuff. Um, (--)

R: There's a lot of stuff in this book if you want to take it.

D: How do you think (--) Well I mean obviously the fact that you were working affected your home life with Terry and Bill. Um (--)

R: No it didn't.

D: Well seeing that you never saw your husband. [All laugh]

R: That's why we got along so good. [All laugh] Don't put that down.

D: So what did you (--) You left little notes for each other and (--)

R: Yeah. I'd leave one propped up on the table so he could read it. Give him his orders for the next day. [All laugh] He's tell me what was going on. Oh dear!

D: And you both, did you both have weekends off?

R: No, that's the trouble. Because I always had the weekend off, but he, in the police department they rotated their days.

D: So you never knew when he would off.

R: So of course at one time they only had a day off, but then it got to the point where they had two days off. And like every other thing, at first they had a small vacation and then you know, it developed into two weeks and three weeks. So at the end of our span of working years, you know, we were getting you know, lots of more time to go places. We did, we did a lot of stuff. Went to a lot of the different places.

D: Okay, good. Did you (--) Now you said before you weren't really very involved with the unions and you don't really remember too much about when they started, or [R: no, I don't] how you joined.

R: I can't remember the year. Everybody had to join the union. You're almost compelled to join the union. And we just all joined the union. And then they'd take out you know, so much out of your pay to pay for the union members I suppose. But uh, to get involved with it, I never did. Though there was two or three in my room that were very high up in the union. [D: Umhm] In fact their pictures are right here in this book. [Shuffling through pages in book]

D: Oh yeah, yeah.

R: See that?

D: Mildred Rivers.

R: That's Bill Coyne's cousin. [D: Uh huh] And wait till I show you the me. They look like the, they look like those pictures on your license.

D: Rose Coyne. [Rose laughs] Did you um (--)

R: See all of these friends. She worked, and she worked, all of these different people worked right in the miscellaneous dry testing and stamping.

D: So did you ever um, participate in the strikes?

R: Well yes I did, but uh, when everybody walked out you'd have to walk out. You know, you'd have to go out. [D: unclear] But I never uh, I never picketed or anything like that.

D: Umhm. Okay. Um, (--)

R: I really think you know, unions really spoiled Sprague's. You know, they demanded so much that eventually you know, they just couldn't keep up with them. [D: Really] Everybody thinks that.

D: Umhm. So you didn't really support the union in some of the things that they were asking for. You just kind of felt you had to join it?

R: Yeah, and I wasn't the only one. I mean, you know, everybody did the same thing. I guess you really should belong to the union. Cause I suppose there are some cases where you really need a union to well, they have to dispel whatever things happened during the day, or somebody wasn't getting a fair shake. You know, you'd go to the union they'd straightened that out. The circumstances, whatever it was. That, you know, you really needed a union for those kinds of things.

D: But in the end you felt that the union was damaging to Sprague's?

R: I thought so. Don't put that in the transcript.

D: [Chuckles] Um, okay. Good. What was uh, what was it like living in North Adams during the depression while you worked at Sprague's?

R: Well, it certainly wasn't plentiful like it is now. You know, like uh, you were um, you had, you had tickets. Like they would allow you so much sugar and so much different kinds of food. You'd have these tickets. And of course if you didn't use yours you could give them to somebody else as long as they used the tickets. There was butter on ration, sugar, meat, lots of things on ration. But it didn't affect our family, because you know, a small family, we never went overboard on eating like. [D: Right] You know, some people have stocks of stuff.

D: And you were both working, right?

R: Yeah, but during the time of rationing, when there was butter and sugar and that stuff, well my Uncle Charlie, he really liked sugar. And he thought, well, he was so afraid that he wouldn't have any sugar, that he used to say, my sugar tickets are gone already. And everyone said, oh, poor Uncle Charlie hasn't any sugar [unclear]. [D: laughs] So we'd bring him up more sugar tickets. And then when he died, about 1955 he died, we were cleaning out the house. He had one small cupboard in the back with lots of shelves on it. And he had sugar. He had, honest to God he must have had a ton of it in there. [All laugh] But you know what he did too with the sugar? You know he used to make wine. And he never, which he never drank. [All laugh] And of course when we got there we had to pour all of the wine down the drain, because nobody would drink it, it was so old. But it took sugar to make that. And there he was hoarding the sugar and we're going around without it. [All laugh] So everybody has a little cork in their nature.

D: Umhm. All right. One more question and then we'll take, at least take a break. Maybe we can come back later.

R: You can go up to Millie's.

D: Yeah. What uh, (--) When the war ended how did that affect employment at Sprague's? In

general and for you personally.

R: Well it started to uh (--) Well of course I had quite a bit of seniority. [D: Umhm] And uh, we stayed, but the younger people that just came in, they got laid off. But as time went on there was new, new rooms opening up, you know, with new units. Making new units and new condensers for different kinds of appliances. So they would start new units, new units and new rooms and they would hire back the people that were laid off. [D: Right] All according to seniority.

D: Umhm. But you were far enough up on the scale to (--)

R: Yeah, I didn't get laid off like that.

D: Okay, good. Well let's take a break and maybe we can come back later.

R: But see now, my sister and I both started in 42. And uh, in my twenty-five years I had a lot of time off, because I had three or four bad sicknesses where you could get a leave of absence. So that takes away from your time. When Millie's (--) Now Millie worked, I think she worked thirty-three years. [D: Umhm] You know, she had more time plugged in. And of course she knows more about the union, because when she (--) After I left the unions got really strong.

D: Yeah. Okay.

R: More sophisticated and everything.

D: Anything else you want to say before we stop the tape.

R: I don't think there's anything left to say.

D: [Laughs] Okay. Well there are a few more questions we'll ask you maybe later on, but we'll take a break for awhile. Okay, thanks.

TAPE I, SIDE I ENDS

TAPE I, SIDE II BEGINS

D: This is Dan Coyne interviewing my grandmother Rose Coyne, [R: Hello Dan] for the Shifting Gears Project. We're having the interview at her house. And we're just going to finish up with a few more question. May 22, 1988.

Um, um, do you remember when exactly you left Sprague's as an employee? Or approximately?

R: See, that's forty-two years. 1970 and I retired.

D: You did retire.

R: Retired in 1970.

D: Um, how do you feel (--) How did you feel about retiring? Were you sixty-five at the time?

R: I was sixty-five. [D: Umhm] Well I felt kind of sad. You know, it was a nice place to work. As I said before, it was a good department to be working in.

D: Umhm, umhm. Did you have, did you have a retirement party?

R: They gave me a big retirement party. And uh, it was a surprise retirement party. And in fact I prepared it for myself.

D: [Laughs] Some surprise.

R: Yeah. Well they said they were having a party on somebody. So I was, had a handful helping and bringing some food in. And then of course the day of the party we all were dressed up to have it. And they said well, it's time now. We're going to have it down in the lunch room. So we all walked down to the lunch room. When I got down there they all said, surprise! And who come in the door but Chief William F. Coyne with Mr. Pierce, one of the overseers. Well I really was surprise then. And of course they gave me all kinds of gifts. Money and bouquets and a Christmas Spray. I think it was in the fall. Christmas Sprays and suitcases. Really had a grand time.

D: Uh huh. Now was that sponsored (--) Did, did the organ(--) Did Sprague as an organization sponsor that, or was it just your co-workers?

R: This was just our co-workers. This was a private party. [D: Umhm] But the foreman and supervisors all were in favor of it and they all came too. [D: Umhm] It was a beautiful meal.

D: All right. Um, [voice in background whispering] um, how do you feel about your retirement benefits. I mean do you feel that they're adequate?

R: They're not adequate now. [D: Umhm] But uh, when I, when the union first started and they instituted the pension plan, [D: Umhm] you'd get so much for every year you worked. You know, so much money. Like say, \$3.00 maybe for one year. Second year would be \$6.00, you know, and it would build up like that. But uh, I think the pension plan was only in about five years when I retired. So therefore my pension is very low compared to what they have now.

D: Right. Okay. Um, all right. Just some closing things. How do you feel looking back on your, your work at Sprague's? You know, what impressions do you have?

R: Oh I feel it was useful. You know, it helped financially and you never had to work overtime. You never, like if you, sometimes when you're working in the office or something, you've got to work overtime, or come back on Saturdays, but in there you punch a clock at a certain time and you get out at a certain time. And that's good when you're married, because you can come home

and do your work at home. So it never interfered with our life at all. And I really enjoyed working there. And I made so many friends. [D: Umhm] And I still have them. They're lifelong friends. There was nobody in that room that didn't know a thing about what was going on in your house. When all of them women got together they knew what you were buying your daughters and who your sons went out with and how long they stayed out. [D: Laughs] And there wasn't anything we didn't know about each other. [Laughs]

D: Uh, is there anything that you would do differently if you had to do it all again? Would you, would you like to go through it the same way, or was there something you'd like to change.

R: Put it on now. You got it on? [D: yeah] Under the same circumstances I suppose I'd have done the same thing. But maybe if I was to do it over I'd maybe go to school, you know. Bring myself up a little higher, or maybe I'd try to get back in the office or something. But I was always satisfied there. [D: Umhm]

Female Voice: Would you have wanted Sprague to have changed anything? Like any of their policies, or anything with the unions? Would you [end of comment unclear]?

R: No, I thought they were fine. I never could find any fault. But some people, some people found fault the minute they stepped in the door till they went home at night. I guess they're hard to please. No, we always was treated so good in our room. As I say, I don't know how the other rooms were, but our room was always great.

D: Now how did your work situation and the conditions and the environment, how was that different when you left Sprague's then from when you first went it?

R: Oh, it was, the environmental issue over there?

D: Well just you know, working conditions, your whole situation?

R: Oh yeah, the working conditions were a lot better. You know, the rooms were all cleaned up and there was new floors and shiny windows, and you know, a lot of the system was a lot better. You know, the work was easier for you. [D: Umhm] And of course in the last, well the last ten years I stamped. And as I say, that was kind of a nice job, stamping.

D: Right.

R: Then it would go (--) And then as I said before, all the stamping though had to be rechecked. Oh and then, well if you didn't have (--) If you had some stamps that weren't good, you'd get them back. And that's when you'd have to do them for free. [Chuckles]

D: So uh, I get the (--)

R: They call that, they call that the last check inspection of the unit, you know, when it went up to the end of the room. That's where all of the check inspectors were.

D: Okay. Um, so I get the impression that you basically look back at your work at, your work at Sprague's and uh, and you look back on the management and everything fairly positively?

R: Yeah, as a happy time in my life.

D: Umhm, okay. Why do you think that Sprague reduced their work force and um, moved away and started closing the local plants? What do you think the reasoning was?

R: Well in the first place they didn't have as many uh, there was no war, you know, after all the different wars. You know during the war business picks up and those kind of plants have a lot of orders, war orders. And of course when them depleted, well then they had to substitute some other kind of a unit. And I think that's why they had to lay people off.

D: Umhm. All right. Uh, what do you think that Sprague's overall impact on the community was? Um, what was it's influence on North Adams?

R: Well it helped the economy that's for sure. [D: Umhm] You know with all of them people working. And then of course as I say, the unions got in a demanded so much money that then they started to kind of cut corners on the inside. You know, laid off a lot of foreman and supervisors that they didn't need, which they had before. And a lot of help which they, cause I say, cut corners and then made people do a little more for an hour than they use to do. And that's how they, you know, could make ends meet, or whatever they call it in the office. It's got a name. [D: Balance] Yeah, to balance the budget. [Laughs]

D: Well how do you think that they're closing up and moving away, how do you think that will or is affecting North Adams?

R: Well it's bad for North Adams. All of these people are out of work now and some of them still haven't any work. But of course a lot of them were at the age that they retired, so they're getting a small pension and their social security. So they're making out all right. But other people have gone to Pittsfield and of course others will never, you know, never work again, because they were too old to find another job. [D: Um] Especially if they got out when they're late fifties. That's pretty hard to find a job then.

D: Debbie, is there anything that you can think of that you would like to ask? [Debbie: No]

R: I haven't told.

D: Uh, is there anything, closing remarks you'd want to make, or any stories, or anything that you haven't told that you'd like to relay, or?

R: Yeah. Well we were having a Christmas Party. And every year each department had their own party. And it was quite a huge affair. Everybody would be dressed up. And they cleaned the end of the room where they would spot check and they would empty those two tables for us and cover them over with clean paper. And everybody would bring their food in and lay it on the table there, and bring their forks and knives and paper plates. And then it would come time to

eat, we would, the men would take it and put it in the big ovens and warm the food up. And there was everything there. And especially uh, oh, there was spaghetti and meatballs and uh, stews and roasts, and uh, any kind of food. Everybody brought something you know. Casserole dishes and cabbage and especially on particular dish, they called the [Galonkies]. It's cabbage rolled around meat and they were you know, lined up a a big long pan. And two of the three women use to bring them. And oh, everybody used to love those. And of course with about um, jeeze, maybe eighty to ninety people there you know, there maybe wasn't enough for one of them for everybody. Well this particular lady anyway, the meal was all over and everybody had a great time. We had grab bags and they changed them. It was a good time as [unclear]. Dong, the bell rings. So back to work we go. Have to leave the table just like that, because we got to get back at work at the right time, you know. So we all hustle back to work. And so this one lady in particular, she thought that would be a good thing for her supper, if she could snatch the rest of the galonkies and hide them. [D: laughs] So she took the pan and she hid them. Well I don't know where she hid them, but somebody found them. So anyway, when it come time at night to go home, it was around 5:00, she went to get her pan of galonkies, and there was no galonkies. My God. [D: laughs] I'm still laughing. I could never get over that. I laughed so hard I thought I was going to be sick. But the thing is she was really put out about it. They weren't hers, but she decided she was going to have them, because nobody else wanted them. They were going to you know, throw everything in the trash. So she even went and got the supervisor and then the foreman, and tried to find out who had to galonkies before we went home, because she really raised the roof. But she didn't find them. Nobody would dare say they took them. [D: Laughs] But wasn't that funny? You know the funny thing was, she was so mad and we're all laughing so hard that I imagine it made her madder. [D: still laughing] We just couldn't help it. I'm still laughing when I got home. So we always said, the mystery of the galonkies. [Male voice: The mystery of who stole the galonkies?] Yeah, the mystery, who stole the galonkies? We never to this day, after fifty years ever found out who took them. [Laughs] You know I would love to know who took them just the same. We had a lot of nice times there. A lot of nice times.

D: Well grandma, thank you very much for your time.

R: Oh you're welcome. I don't know, who's going to hear this?

D: Oh well, um, Dr. Burns will hear it [R: Oh] and he might use it for some research or something. But thanks (--)

R: You mean Dr. Burns over in Williamstown? [D: laughs] That Dr. Burns?

D: Uh (--)

R: Must be huh?

D: I don't know where, he lives in North Adams.

R: Well of course he's got a son. They both go to Williams.

D: Yeah that's, I don't know. [Laughs] Well anyway grandma, thank you very (--)

R: Those people can get such good stories from [unclear] and all of them people that worked in Williamstown. That worked at Sprague's and now live in Williamstown. You get first hand information.

D: Okay. Well thanks again for your time and we really appreciate it.

R: You're very welcomed.